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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: GETTING CLOSER TO WHAT KASHMIRIS THINK

Classified By: Polcouns Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

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[11](#). (C) Summary: Many Indian experts on J&K insist that they know what Kashmiris think about the major political issues of interest in the Val of which was taken in April. For all their methodological weaknesses, the surveys provide a window into sentiment and trends in J&K, while some of the main conclusions -- little support for accession to Pakistan, majority favoring independence, weak separatist All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) popularity, and conflicted attitudes towards the LOC as a border -- largely track with our past reporting. End Summary.

[12](#). (C) It is notoriously difficult to obtain a fix on Kashmiri views about major political issues. We have a high degree of confidence that alienation against India runs quite deep there, that there is substantial pro-independence sentiment, and that a smallish minority wants to accede to Pakistan. It is also clear that Kashmiris are very tired of the insurgency, want foreign terrorists to stop infiltrating and to leave the Valley, and would rejoice at a return to normalcy. The Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus is very, very popular, despite some criticism that the travel process is cumbersome. Most Kashmiris want the security force footprint to be smaller or to disappear (but many link this to a cessation of terrorism), and human rights abuses by all sides to the conflict to stop.

[13](#). (C) Beyond that, assessments get trickier, despite some Indian Kashmir watchers' firm conviction that they know exactly what Kashmiris think -- such as assertions by some that an overwhelming majority in the Valley would vote for independence if they ever had the choice, to cite one fairly widespread opinion. Without dismissing views like this, we posit that sentiment is more difficult to quantify and subject to variables that have not been factored into the debate. For example, aside from the almost complete absence of visible public debate in J&K on these and other issues, Indian experts who have dealt with J&K for many years remind us that Kashmiris rarely tell outsiders what they really think -- and if they do their views are often not well thought out. Some Kashmir watchers go so far as to joke that they cannot be entirely certain that Kashmiris will even accurately give their names.

Three Surveys

[14](#). (C) In an attempt to fill the void of empirical data on what Kashmiris really think, and to obtain a better read on popular views on some of the bigger issues at stake in the Valley, three attempts have been made since 2002 by private polling firms -- Synovate India for the "Times of India" in April 2005 (Srinagar and Rajouri); AC Nielsen with "Asian Age" in September 2002 (Srinagar, Anantnag, Jammu, and Udhampur); and Facts Worldwide for MORI in April 2002 (Srinagar, Jammu, Leh, and seven rural areas). Each survey was slightly different in focus, but several questions were similar and/or repeated, providing a sense of comparison. None of the polling firms followed up on their questions again, complicating attempts to trace trends. Questions also arise concerning geographic coverage. Nevertheless, some questions were sufficiently similar that they allow for comparisons, and provide a window into movement over time. The most interesting results of the April 2005 poll show:

-- interest in the LOC as the International Border:

TOI/2005 55 percent in favor
AC Nielsen/2002 1 percent (Srinagar) in favor; 8 percent (Anantnag)
Mori did not consider this issue

-- a bit of consistency in views on independence, India and Pakistan:

For Independence:

TOI: 54 percent
AC Nielsen: 48 percent (Srinagar); 59 percent (Anantnag)
Mori did not consider this issue

For India:

TOI 36 percent
AC Nielsen: 21 percent (Srinagar); 5 percent (Anantnag)
Mori: 61 percent

For Pakistan:

TOI: 3 percent
AC Nielsen 0 percent (Srinagar); 0 percent (Anantnag)
Mori: 6 percent

-- strong support for Indo-Pak trade:

TOI: 96 percent in favor
Mori: 70 percent in favor

-- a decline in Hurriyat popularity

TOI: 16 percent feels APHC represents them
AC Nielsen: 22 percent of population would vote for APHC

2005 Additional Points

¶5. (U) The April 2005 survey brought out several additional noteworthy items:

-- Massive support in J&K (95 percent) for expanding the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus, indicating Kashmiri public opinion is overwhelmingly behind "soft borders;"

-- Overwhelming sentiment (84 percent) that Indo-Pak talks on Kashmir must include representatives of the Kashmiri people; and

-- A majority (62 percent) believes the state government better represents Kashmir than the Hurriyat.

Comment

¶6. (C) These surveys are by no means definitive readings of Kashmiri views, but are useful as the only empirical data in the public domain. With the usual caveats, the polls reveal several items of interest -- particularly regarding interest in accession to Pakistan (very low), desire for independence (over 50 percent), and acceptance of the Hurriyat as leaders representative of Kashmiri aspirations (relatively low). As such, the surveys confirm most of our observations derived from many reporting visits to J&K and extensive interaction with Indian Kashmir experts and a broad spectrum of Kashmiri leaders and ordinary Kashmiris during the last three years.

¶7. (C) There are at least two interpretations of the apparent contradiction in the April 2005 survey between a majority desire in the Valley for independence and acceptance of the LOC as the Indo-Pak border: 1) Kashmiris increasingly recognize that territory in J&K is unlikely to change hands between India and Pakistan, and that the LOC is where the border will eventually be; or 2) Kashmiri views remain confused on many issues. We have found ordinary Kashmiris often very poorly informed, XXXXXXXXXXXX such logical inconsistencies would not be unusual. Voting behavior, which we have described exhaustively, demonstrates other important aspects of Kashmiri political opinion.

BLAKE

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